

Rwanda's Secret War

US-Backed Destabilization of Central Africa

By **Keith Harmon Snow***

WW3Report
December 10, 2004

Following days of repeated threats by President Paul Kagame to send Rwandan Defense Forces to attack Hutu rebels based in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), television stations in Kinshasa, DRC's capital, began broadcasting alerts Nov. 26 that Rwanda's invasion was underway. Belgian and US military sources in Kinshasa said that at least five battalions (1,500-3,000 troops) had penetrated the provinces of North and South Kivu from five different points. "This is a sizeable advance force for the Rwandan army," said one military source in Kinshasa.

With Rwanda's government continuing to deny their invasion, some 6,000 Rwandan troops had reportedly penetrated eastern DRC by December 4, making this tiny Rwanda's third major invasion of its huge neighbour to the west. According to the DRC government, troops of the Armed Forces for the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) have clashed with the RDF at numerous locations. The Monitor newspaper in Uganda Dec. 6 reported that RDF troops passing illegally through Ugandan frontier areas have clashed with Ugandan soldiers. The Monitor reports thousands of Congolese refugees fleeing into Uganda. Thousands of Congolese civilians, especially women and children, were fleeing North Kivu province as of Dec. 6, according to IRIN, news network of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, with civilians claiming executions and massacres as RDF troops burned and looted everything in their path. NGO staff in the region are bracing for the flood of tens of thousands of internally displaced persons.

The claims were echoed by Rwandan guerrilla groups based in DRC. "According to our sources five Rwandan battalions are already in the DRC ready to create chaos," reported Jean-Marie Higiroy, former leader of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). "Kagame's regime maintains its sponsorship to rebel DRC forces. Under all kinds of tricks, Kagame's regime is able to continue to pull the strings in the DRC." He also rejected claims that the Rwandan military is acting in self-defence from DRC-based guerrillas. "Rwanda and its proxy armies in DRC maintain an absolute cordon sanitary at the Rwandan-Congolese border," Higiroy says. "How can Hutu rebels break through this cordon sanitary and strike Rwanda, then retreat into the DRC without being intercepted?"

Rwanda's latest bid to annex DRC's Kivu provinces was called the "Third War of Occupation of Eastern Congo" by Congolese students who took to the streets of Kisangani in protest on Dec. 4. Despite Rwanda's official denials of aggression, Rwandan leaders had actually issued unambiguous warnings in recent days. "You have to make war to have peace," Rwanda's President Paul Kagame told United Nations peacekeeping forces on Nov. 23. "We are preparing to return our forces to the DRC," Rwanda's Regional Cooperation Minister Protais Mitali said on the 25th,

according to Reuters. "We cannot watch as these extremist forces advance onto our territory."

Reuter's correspondent David Lewis in Kinshasa reported Nov. 26 that the Congolese army has told the United Nations that its soldiers had clashed with Rwandan troops inside Congo. UN peacekeepers found no signs of any fighting, according to Lewis' U.N. sources. Lewis also reported that clashes had taken place earlier in the week. United Nations Observer Mission in Congo (MONUC) sources and NGO workers contacted in Goma and Bukavu were unable to confirm the presence of Rwandan troops or the engagement of Rwandan and DRC soldiers.

In Kinshasa, long-time Mobutu opposition party leader Etienne Tshisekedi from the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) issued a communiqué Nov. 26 warning that if Rwanda has again invaded DRC then the Congolese people must demonstrate against MONUC. May and June 2004 saw major demonstrations across DRC where MONUC vehicles and homes rented by MONUC personnel were destroyed in protest of MONUCs perceived failure to defend the city of Goma from the invading forces of pro-Rwandan rebel groups in Congo.

It is true that Rwandan and Ugandan guerrilla groups continue to maintain a presence in eastern DRC, including the ex-Force Armee Rwandais (ex-FAR, the former Rwandan army), Interahamwe (the militia largely responsible for the 1994 genocide), Allied Democratic Forces for Uganda (ADF). The DRC government and international community have failed to implement the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process called for by international peace accords. Rwanda has repeatedly threatened to invade DRC to attack Hutu rebels accused of genocide -- Interahamwe and ex-FAR. The "genocidaires" fled Rwanda in 1994 and established themselves in Hutu refugee camps in eastern Zaire (as DRC was then known), with the help of the French intervention force Operation Tourquoise and support from Zaire's 32-year dictator Mobutu Sese Seko. Rwanda also claimed that it must defend the Banyamulenge -- Congolese Tutsis -- from ongoing genocide.

MONUC entered DRC in 1999 after peace agreements signed in Lusaka, Zambia. Subsequent peace accords in Sun City, South Africa, and negotiations with rebels and militias in eastern DRC, ushered in a peace process under a transitional power-sharing government, implementing a joint UN/DRC program of "DDR," and the promise of elections in 2005. The DDR program has largely been an empty promise. The DRC was formally cited at the UN Security Council on Nov. 23 for its lack of cooperation in the arrest of people accused of taking part in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. In a UN press statement, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), Hassan Bubacar Jallow from Gambia, told the Security Council that 14 indicted people were still at large and "the bulk of the fugitives continued to be based in the Democratic Republic of Congo." The press release stated that the US ambassador to the UN John Danforth called upon the DRC and Kenya to arrest fugitives accused inciting conflicts in the Great Lakes region on the border of DRC and Rwanda. Impunity for government soldiers and guerrillas alike remains endemic in the eastern DRC provinces of Orientale, Equateur and the Kivus. According to a recent alert by Survivor's Rights International, reports from isolated areas across the country indicate that populations continue to suffer wholesale extortion, racketeering, theft, rape and other violence.

Rights groups accused all sides of exploiting ethnic conflict in the region -- including Rwanda's government. "Relations between the Banyamulenge and other Congolese groups have been strained and are frequently manipulated by politicians in both Rwanda and the DRC," wrote Human Rights Watch in a June 2004 report, War Crimes in Bukavu. "The past six years of war have contributed to hostility against them as they are increasingly identified as 'Rwandan' by other Congolese. Rwanda has often justified its presence in DRC in part as an effort to protect the Banyamulenge people, though this was challenged in 2002 when they attacked the Banyamulenge homelands killing scores of Banyamulenge civilians, shooting some of them from Rwandan helicopters."

Central Africa's Ongoing Genocide

Paul Kagame's Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA) invaded Rwanda from Uganda in 1990, launching a four-year campaign of guerrilla warfare. Open support for Rwanda's then-Hutu-led government from French paratroopers failed to prevent the RPA victory of August, 1994, following the coordinated genocide of hundreds of thousands of Rwandan Tutsis by hard-line Hutus, Force Armee Rwandaise (FAR) and affiliated Interahamwe (Hutu) militias from April to July. Critics such as Wayne Madsen, author of *Genocide and Covert Operations in Africa 1993-1999*, assert that Kagame and the RPA orchestrated the April 6, 1994 assassination of the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi -- shooting down their plane on approach to Kigali airport with SAM-7 surface-to-air missiles taken from Iraq by France in 1991, then delivered by the US military to Uganda, the base for RPA guerrilla operations against Rwanda prior to 1994.

Evidence was provided at a special hearing held by then Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney at DC's Rayburn House Office Building on April 6, 2001, the seventh Anniversary of the assassinations. Journalist Charles Onana of Cameroon, author of *The Secrets of the Rwandan Genocide*, also aired claims of RPA involvement in the incident, and was sued for defamation by Paul Kagame. A Paris court found in favour of Onana. Meanwhile, of course, defense attorneys working at the International Criminal Tribunal on Rwanda (ICTR) maintain that the standard figure of 800,000 Tutsis killed in the 1994 genocide is grossly inflated.

Paul Kagame has been a regular visitor at Harvard University, at the James Baker III Institute in Houston Texas, at the White House and the Pentagon. Kagame visited the Pentagon in August 1996, just prior to the Rwandan/Ugandan/US invasion of Zaire. US, European and South African military interests have continued to support various factions in Central Africa, arming militias and rebel groups through proxy armies from Uganda (UPDF), Rwanda (RPA), Burundi and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in south Sudan.

Terror continued in Rwanda under the new RPA government of Paul Kagame, with Amnesty International documenting a pattern of assassinations, arbitrary imprisonment and "disappearances." Nearly all political opponents -- Tutsi or Hutu -- have been labelled "genocidaires", and Amnesty has protested that some trials and executions of accused genocidiare collaborators have been tainted and politically-motivated.

The first Rwandan invasion of its huge neighbour to the west occurred in 1996. According to the influential Africa Confidential newsletter, Major Gen. Paul Kagame visited the Pentagon in August of 1996, conferring with Washington prior to setting in motion a grand plan to unseat Mobutu Sese Seko. While the US public was consumed with the 1996 presidential elections, Rwanda was preparing its war against Zaire -- and it began with the shelling of Hutu refugee camps in eastern Congo with Katusha missiles, killing non-combatants men, women and children. RPA joined with Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF) and the guerrilla army of Laurent Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADFL) in the "War of Liberation" that subsequently ended the decade's long reign of President Mobutu Sese Seko in Congo (Zaire). Sources in DRC quickly add that American military personnel were seen on the ground advising the joint UPDF/RPA invasion which swiftly moved across the vast forested territory of Zaire. Wayne Madsen reported that the US established major communications and listening stations in Uganda's Ruwenzori Mountains. Witnesses interviewed in Kampala, Uganda's capital, support this claim. Communications equipment was also seen on Idjwe Island in Lake Kivu, on the DRC-Rwanda frontier.

Interviews with survivors across the country document crimes against humanity and acts of genocide committed against Congolese civilians by all sides in the ensuing war. "In May 1997, hundreds of unarmed Hutu refugees were massacred in the town of Mbandaka by soldiers of Kabila's Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADFL), operating under apparent Rwandan Army (RPA) command," wrote Human Rights Watch in June 1998. In an October 1997 report ("What Kabila is Hiding: Civilian Killings and Impunity in Congo"), Human Rights Watch concluded that "Rwandan troops had a role in some of the killings of Rwandan Hutu refugees on Zairean territory."

Thousands of Hutu refugees may have been slaughtered in Mbandaka in May, 1997, on the day that the Allied Forces for the Democratic Liberation of Congo (AFDL) arrived there. One eyewitness told this reporter: "We ran down to the beach [port] because we heard the shooting. I saw two people shot but there were bodies all lined up on the beach. The soldiers were also throwing dead bodies in the [Congo] river. There were a lot of Tutsi soldiers but we couldn't distinguish. I saw soldiers question one woman. The woman was not able to talk in [Congolese] Lingala. He said, yes you are among the Rwandais Hutus. He said to the woman, 'Turn, face the river, prey your God, because you are about to meet your God.' Then he shot her in the back with an automatic weapon."

"US special forces were involved," asserted one DRC army captain interviewed recently. The AFDL forces included UPDF, RPA and US military advisers, he claimed. Colonel James Kabarebe, now Chief of Staff of the Rwanda Defense Forces, is said to have led a campaign to annihilate fleeing Hutu refugees. Kabarebe has been sited in UN reports for massive violations in Ituri. "Kabarebe was reportedly the biggest advocate of Rwandan support to [ethnic] militias," wrote UN investigators in MONUC's Special Report on Events in Ituri, January 2002-December 2003. Rwanda armed, trained, and advised militias in Ituri, as it has in North and South Kivu provinces, the report found.

The RPA joined with the UPDF to invade DRC again in 1998 after ADFL leader Laurent Kabila rejected U.S. and Bechtel Corporation plans for the newly liberated country, annulled mining contracts signed with some powerful western companies before he had even taken power in Kinshasa -- including the America Mineral Fields, based in Hope, AK, and said to be linked to then-President Clinton through "Friend of Bill" investors -- and ejected the Rwandan and Ugandan military allies that brought him to power. The Congolese government called it the "War of Aggression," but it was dubbed "Africa's First World War" by the western press, as it involved six regional nations as well as arms and advisers from western countries. Troops from Rwanda and Uganda (now backing anti-Kabila rebels) as well as Zimbabwe (allied with the DRC government) worked with commercial agents pilfering DRC's ivory, diamonds, gold, timber, cobalt and other natural resources. Foreign agents moved these plundered resources onto the international market, as militia groups raked in local profits.

At least 3.5 million people died due to warfare in DRC, according to the International Rescue Committee (IRC) report on the region for the period from 1998 to 2001. From 1999-2001, through networks of Rwandan military and commercial agents, Rwandan interests aligned with the state earned some \$120 million in the sale of coltan (Colombo-tantalite) -- a precious ore essential to Sony play-stations, laptop computers and cell-phones. In December 2000 alone, the main RPA-supported rebel group in DRC earned some \$600,000 in coltan sales. Coltan moved through criminal syndicates to American, Swiss, Belgian and German clients. Rwandan syndicates continue to dominate the coltan trade out of eastern DRC, local sources claim.

Friends of the Earth and the UK-based group Rights and Accountability in Development (RAID) filed a formal complaint with the US State Department on August 4, 2004 against three US companies accused by the UN Panel of Experts of fueling war in DRC. The UN panel's three-year investigation implicated Cabot Corporation (Boston), Eagle Wings Resources International and George Forrest's OM Group (Ohio) in collaboration with various rebel groups trafficking in coltan from DRC. Current deputy director of the US Treasury Department, Samuel Bodman, was CEO and chairman of Cabot from 1997-2001.

An Unravelling Peace Process

The DRC frontier with Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi has remained the locus of instability and guerrilla warfare since before the first Rwandan invasion of Congo in 1996 and the rising insecurity and terrorism has not gone unnoticed by the local civilian populations. North and South Kivu provinces continue to suffer from widespread violence, and killings in the Goma and Bukavu areas are rampant. The Ituri region of Orinetale Province, bordering on Uganda, Sudan and Central African Republic, is cited as one of the bloodiest corners of the world by numerous human rights agencies. The UN Security Council's Special Report on Ituri, January 2002-December 2003, outlines the history of conflict in Ituri, the role of Ugandan and Rwandan government forces in arming factions, bombing villages, massacring and torturing civilians, and provoking and, at times, abetting, acts of genocide.

Given the rising insecurity in Ituri in recent months, with assassinations and nightly shootings, the population in Bunia increasingly sees MONUC as a hostile and

aggressive force of foreign military occupation. Said one Bunia resident formerly employed by MONUC: "Public opinion is that MONUC has done nothing. People thought that MONUC came here to bring peace but to their surprise people find that MONUC is like a spectator in a football match. But people are dying in their presence. People are being terrorized in their presence. People are being killed in their presence. And MONUC is doing nothing." "Firing incidents occur daily," admitted one public information officer for MONUC. "I don't think there is any area except maybe in Bunia [town] where the human rights situation is improving." Reports of MONUC personnel buying and transporting contraband goods -- leopard and okapi skins, gold, ivory -- are also widespread.

Arms continue to flow into the region. Uganda's government newspaper the New Vision Nov. 23 reported that arms shipments reportedly destined for the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC), a regional militia aligned with Rwanda, were seized by the Armed Forces of the Congolese People (FAPC), a rival Congolese militia in control of the lucrative Ituri Province customs posts in north eastern DRC. The story was picked up by a Chinese news service only. "According to local sources, local government officials have delivered firearms to civilians in Masisi, North Kivu, long the site of conflict between different political and military groups," wrote Human Rights Watch on November 19. "Other shipments have been delivered to Ituri, another persistently troubled area in north eastern Congo. U.N. sources reported that some 300 Congolese high school students, refugees in neighbouring Rwanda, abruptly left their schools and are said to be undergoing military training."

According to recent reports from northern Ituri, the FAPC has reportedly executed child soldiers seeking to enter the DDR process, and attacked the families and looted the homes of reintegrated ex-child soldiers. The UPC and the Force for National Liberation (FNI), another militia, continue to extort a weekly war tax from citizens, persecute those who refuse to comply, and terrorize the citizenry. "All armed groups in Ituri have integrated children into their ranks," wrote MONUC investigators in Special Report on Events in Ituri, January 2002-December 2003. MONUC conservatively estimated "at least 40 percent of each militia force are children below the age of 18, with a significant minority below the age of 15."

The MONUC investigation found that Ugandan and Rwandan military were frequently training children abducted and forcibly or willingly recruited into DRC militias. MONUC documented cases where hundreds of children were taken by road or plane to Uganda or Rwanda for military training. Child soldiers were sometimes "trained" by child soldiers. Some children have been passed from one group to another. The UPC and the Force for National Liberation (FNI) another militia, continue to extort a weekly war tax from citizens, persecute those who refuse to comply, and terrorize the citizenry. Said one witness, "The UPC is collecting money. They say, 'either you pay 100 francs Congolese or we come at night.' Then when they come they cut off your hand or violate women."

"Sexual violence is a national epidemic in DR Congo," wrote Survivors Rights International (SRI) in November, "involving all military factions, both current and past military forces involved in the internal affairs of the DRC, and it appears to be sanctioned by all levels of military command. SRI research completed in Equateur and Orientale (Ituri) from September to November 2004 indicates that the scale and

frequency of sexual violence committed during the successive wars (1996-2004) is unprecedented and unquantifiable." SRI also reported that the presence of hundreds of internally displaced girls and women currently resident in Mbandaka has spawned commerce in prostitution and survival sex involving both Armed Forces of Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) and MONUC troops. "FARDC further prey on female sex workers by forcing sexual relations, raping those who refuse, and universally robbing desperate females of their livelihood," SRI wrote. "FARDC soldiers in rural areas and population centers continue to steal and abduct the wives of civilians, and to abduct women and adolescent girls many of whom are impregnated and abandoned."

SRI called on the UN, MONUC and the international community to define and implement a new strategy for dealing with widespread and ongoing sexual violence, noting "that the societal effects will be long-lasting, and that accountability for sexual violence could be easily countered given greater international attention to gender violence in the DRC and a campaign to end impunity and bring the perpetrators to justice. The MONUC communications infrastructure installed nationwide in DRC (Radio Okapi) provides an excellent and functioning tool for raising the awareness of sexual violence and the growing campaign to hold perpetrators to account through the International Criminal Court."

On November 28, 2004, a group of seven young women arrived in Mbandaka -- after trekking hundreds of miles from Orientale's westernmost city of Lisala -- reporting that they were raped in the past week by government soldiers (FARDC). Other girls are also being raped, the seven survivors said.

Forgotten Resource Wars

Rwanda and Uganda continue to benefit from high-level military arrangements with the United States. Entebbe, Uganda, is a forward base for US Air Force operations in Central Africa. According to the Global Policy watchdog, there are eleven US servicemen permanently stationed in Entebbe.

The Canadian mining firms Barrick Gold and Heritage Oil & Gas arrived with Ugandan (UPDF) and Rwandan (RPA) military during the "War of Aggression" to exploit mining opportunities in the north. Barrick principals include former Canadian premier Brian Mulroney and former US president George H.W. Bush. Heritage has secured contracts for the vast oil reserves of Semliki basin, beneath Lake Albert, on both the Congolese and Ugandan sides of the border. Heritage is reportedly tapping the Semliki petroleum reserves from the Ugandan side, where a huge pipeline to Mombasa, Kenya, worth billions of dollars, is now in the works. According to petroleum futures report (Africa front), Heritage Oil was poised to exploit the northern Lake Albert basin, southern Lake Albert basin, River Semliki basin, and Lake George and Lake Albert basin areas in partnership with the Zhongyuan Petroleum Exploration Bureau (ZPEB) of China.

Ashanti Goldfields has reportedly secured a contract for the vast gold reserves at Mongwalu, north of Bunia. Ashanti has ties to the British Crown and some sources in Bunia report that the Ashanti interest in nearby Mongwalu is guarded by Nepalese

Gurkhas, possibly of the Gurkha Security Group based in Britain. Elsewhere in DRC, major foreign mining and logging contracts are underway.

About the Author: *Keith Harmon Snow is a journalist and photographer specializing in Central Africa. He attended the Criminal Tribunal on Rwanda (ICTR) in Tanzania in 2000, and provided expert testimony at a special congressional hearing in Washington DC. His work on genocide and covert operations in Africa won two Project Censored awards in 2002. His website is <http://www.allthingspass.com/>.*

<http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/congo/2004/1210secretwar.htm>